SURİYE AYAKLANMASININ FARKLILIĞI

ÖZ

Bu makalede, Arap Bahar'ının başlaması ile birlikte Tunus ve Mısır'daki gibi barışçıl protestolar yoluyla veya Libya'daki gibi iç savaşla ya da Yemen'deki gibi bu ikisinin arasında bir yolla yönetim değişikliğine giden ülkelerden farklı olarak iç çatışmaların, üç yılını doldurmasına ve çökmüş bir devlet yapısına rağmen ne rejim ne de lider değişimine uğrayan Suriye'nin kendine has farklılığı analiz edilecektir. Her ne kadar rejimin protestolar karşısındaki kırılganlığı işlemeyen devletler sistemi, belirli bir devlet inşa etme yöntemi ve küresel neo-liberailzm şemsiyesi altında post-popülizme kayan hareket gibi yapısal nedenlere dayansa da, bu çalışma Suriye'nin farklılığını şiddet içermeyen kitlesel protestoların demokrasiye geçişteki başarısızlığının; muhalefetin sınırlılıkları ve rejimin beklenmeyen direncinin ve olayların "güvenlik ikilemi"ne ve ebedi bir "savaş ekonomisi"ne dönüşmesinin sonucu olarak açıklamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler :Suriye, Ayaklanma; şiddet içermeyen protesto; demokratik geçiş; otoriter direnç; güvenlik ikilemi

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الاختلافات التي تميزت بها الانتفاضة السورية

ريموند حنا بوش خلاصة :

تتناول هذه المقالة تحليل اختلاف وتميز الوضع السياسي الخاص بسوريا التي لم تتمكن من الاطاحة بالنظام وتحقيق التغيير السياسي كما حدث في مصر وتونس من خلال المظاهرات السلمية وكذلك لم تستطع تحقيقه ايضا من خلال الحرب الاهلية كما حدث في ليبيا او من خلال الطريقة التي تعتبر وسطا كما حدث في مصر وسوريا وما حدث في لبيا وهي الطريقة التي استطاع من خلالها اليمنيون الاطاحة بنظام الحكم هناك حيث تحولت المظاهرات بسوريا الي منازعات داخلية استمرت نحو ثلاث سنوات دون امكانية الاطاحة بالنظام بالرغم من بنيتها السياسية الهشة. ويمكننا القول بان النظام السوري نظام ضمن الانظمة التي لا يمكن الاطاحة به من خلال المظاهرات السلمية وحتي ولو اعتمد على اسباب هيكلية مثل الحركة التي مالت الي الشعبوية الجديدة تحت مظلة النيو ليبرالية العالمية وطريقة بناء دولة معينة حيث تقوم هذه المقالة بتوضيح الاختلافات التي تميزت بها سوريا عن باقي الدول التي عاشت الربيع العربي، وكذلك الفشل الذي مرت به الحركة الشعبية في عدم نجاحها في الاطاحة بالنظام من خلال المظاهرات السلمية وتحقيق الديمقراطية وكذلك ايضا الامكانيات المحدودة لدى المعارضة والمقاومة والتماسك غير المتوقع الذي اظهره النظام، كما يتم التاكيد في هذه المقالة على ان نهاية كل هذه الاحداث التي تشهدها سوريا تكمن في تحولها الي معضلة امنية وحرب اقتصادية.

الكلمات الدالة: سوريا، الانتفاضة، المظاهرات السلمية، التحول الديمقراطي، مقاومة السلطة الاستبدادية، معضلة الامن.

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THE TANGENT OF THE SYRIAN UPRISING*

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the unique tangent of the Arab Uprising in Syria, namely one where Uprising did not lead to overthrow of a president, either through peaceful protest (Tunisia, Egypt), or civil war (Libya) or some middle path (Yemen), but rather after three years of civil conflict, president and regime remain standing, but the state has failed. While the vulnerability of the regime to the Uprising lay in structure-the flawed states system, a particular state building formulas, and the movement under global neo-liberalism, to "post-populism," the paper explains Syria's tangent as an outcome of the failure of mass non-violent protest to lead to democratic transition; the limits of the opposition and unexpected regime resilience; descent into the "security dilemma" and an eternally-driven "war economy."

Keywords: Syria; Uprising; non-violent protest; democratic transition; authoritarian resilience; security dilemma.

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*This analysis utilizes empirical written material by Omar Imady and Tina Zintl; however, the interpretation of the material is wholly the author's own.

At the outset of the Arab Uprising, President Bashar al-Asad famously declared that Syria was different because the leadership and people shared the same values-stability and nationalist steadfastness--which his regime had delivered--and hence that the Arab spring would not spread to his country. He was, of course, wrong, but over three years after the outbreak, Asad's regime constitutes the domino left standing.

What explains the unique tangent of the Arab Uprising in Syria, namely one where Uprising did not lead to overthrow of a president, either through peaceful protest (Tunisia, Egypt), or civil war (Libya) or some middle path (Yemen), but rather after three years of civil conflict, president and regime remain standing, but the state has failed?

Toward Understanding the Syrian Tangent: Between Structure and Agency

Several key concepts or issues are needed to grasp the Syrian tangent:

1) We can see the *vulnerability of the regime* to the Uprising by examination of its structural roots-the flawed states system, particular state building formulas, and the movement under global neo-liberalism, to "post-populism." While this paper will briefly examine this, it has been amply covered elsewhere[1] and will here be treated chiefly as the *context* for understanding the Syrian tangent.

2) The paper will argue that this tangent is best seen as the outcome of agency, with the choices of actors-regime and opposition-generating a path dependency that locked both into unwanted and unexpected outcomes. To understand the particular tangent the uprising took, we need to look at four issues of agency: a) the failure of mass non-violent protest to lead to democratic transition; b) the limits of the opposition and unexpected regime resilience; c) the descent into the "security dilemma" and d) an eternally-driven "war economy."

Theoretical perspectives: flaws of the non-violent resistance paradigm

According to the mass non-violent protest paradigm, mass protest can rapidly and effectively destabilize authoritarian regimes. The work of Stephan and Chenoweth[2] not only describes the dynamics of mass protest, but also has evidently inspired Arab protestors. They argue that mass protest can readily destabilize au-

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[1] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: from Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs*, January 2012; Raymond Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl, *Syria: From Reform to Revolt: Politics and International Relations*, (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

[2] Erica Chenoweth, and Maria J. Stephan, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict, *International Security,* Vol.33, No:1, 2008, 7-44.

thoritarian regimes; even if the regime refuses protestors' demands and uses violence against them, this is likely to backfire, stimulating wider anti-regime mobilization, precipitating international sanctions and support for the opposition, and, most importantly, causing defections in the security forces, which will be reluctant to use violence against fellow citizens who are not themselves using violence.

The problem with this literature is that it leaves little agency to ruling elites, when, in fact, how they respond to mass protest makes all the difference for outcomes--which can range from peaceful democratization to regime collapse to civil war. The best chance for peaceful democratization is, as the transition paradigm argues, a pact wherein the opposition refrains from threatening the vital interests of incumbents who, in return, concede a pluralisation of the political system. Such a scenario is more likely when non-violent resistance encourages moderates within the regime to push for reform and withdraw their support from hard-line authoritarians and less likely when rebels make maximalist demands or resort to violence, thereby empowering hardliners against the moderates.[3] The former scenario arguably held in the Egyptian and Tunisian cases, the latter in Syria or Libya. In Syria, from this "original sin," in which both sides were complicit, a downward spiral toward a failed state and civil war resulted.

What the non-violent protest paradigm also fails to anticipate is the consequences when protest destabilizes the state but does not lead to democratic transition. The outcome may well be a failed state, a Hobbesian world in which life becomes "nasty, shortish and brute." Also, it does not appreciate that such a breakdown in order may be very difficult to reverse. Even though a "hurting stalemate" ought, at a certain point, to lead actors to realize neither can defeat the other, and hence to seek a compromise political settlement, what is equally possible is what happened in the Syrian case-each hoped to win by further escalating the level of violence, encouraged by external backers. This takes on an autonomous logic outside of the control of leaders, for once the state fails and order breaks down, the "security dilemma"[4] kicks in: as all groups, fearing the other, fall back on group solidarity for protection and seek their own security through what they see as self-protective violence, insecurity actually increases for all, making for an unstoppable spiral of violence. But additionally, as the normal economy collapses, a "war economy" in which people deprived of a normal life seek survival through spoils and flock to those groups with access to largely external funding, civil war persists despite the damage it inflicts on all sides.

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[3] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Part 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[4] Barry Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival*, Vol.35, No. 1, Spring 1993.

Structure: The Roots of the Uprising

The origins of the current crisis can ultimately be traced to a failure of state building resulting from the post-WWI imposition of the states system in the region by Western imperialism in what David Fromkin[5] called a "peace to end all peace." Levant states, which had been artificially created by imperialism in violation of the dominant identities of the region's peoples had to compete with powerful sub- and supra-state forces for the loyalties of their populations, and hence suffered built-in legitimacy deficits which made them perhaps set up to fail.

In these circumstances, Arab state builders gravitated toward *neo-patrimonial* practices that combined time-honoured indigenous state-building formulas (Ibn Khaldun's *assabiya* that is, elite solidarity built on primordial ties) with modern bureaucratic machinery and surveillance technology. This formula was empowered, perhaps beyond its shelf life, by the exceptional availability of hydrocarbon and geopolitical rent in the region, which enabled the lubrication of clientele networks supportive of patrimonial rule and also enabled a populist "social contract" with the masses.

Ba'thist populist authoritarianism in Syria was no exception. Hafiz al-Asad established a regime based on the *assabiya* of the Alawi elite that he appointed to strategic commands of the military-security apparatuses; this was combined with rent-fuelled clientalism and the mass incorporation through the Ba'th party of the state-employed middle class and (both Sunni and non-Sunni) peasantry (via land reform); the regime was legitimized by Arab nationalist ideology and defended by the repression of persistent (mostly Islamic) opposition. While this ended Syria's endemic instability and consolidated forty years of Ba'thist rule, each ingredient of Asad's state building recipe had its costs: sectarian *assabiya* alienated out-groups; rent was finite; repression left many politically unincorporated and legitimation from Arab nationalism embroiled Syria in costly regional conflicts and generated Western hostility-particularly dangerous after Asad lost his Cold war era Soviet patron. And, relying on sub-state (Alawi) and supra-state loyalties (Arabism) to an extent deterred consolidation of identifications with the Syrian state.

Across the region, a combination of rent decline and population boom created economic crises that put extreme pressures on the authoritarian republics – especially under the influence of global neo-liberalism – to move toward what might be called "post-populism" in which, as in Syria under Bashar al-Asad, the state withdraws from welfare provision and favours investors, creating a new crony capitalism and exacerbating social inequality. This generated the cocktail of grievances that exploded in the Arab Uprisings.

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[5] David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace; the Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, New York: Avon Books, 1989.

In parallel, even as the global convergence of LDCs toward a homogeneous neo-liberalism was depriving them of their capacity to meet the needs of their growing populations-and in MENA forcing them to renege on the populist "social contract"-- globalization was also accompanied by a diffusion of new media and internet technology, and with it, West-centric democratization discourses that helped to delegitimize the post-populist ruling formulas of regimes like Bashar al-Asad's Syria. The street protest that has become increasingly endemic in the non-Western world is encouraged by both Western NGO funding and democratization discourses.

The younger Asad's post-populist economic policies sowed the seeds of rebellion and made his regime vulnerable to mobilization of discontent; at the same time, the regime's reforms debilitated its own institutional base, making it vulnerable to what ultimately became an Sunni Islamist led revolt. There had been similar grievances among Sunnis during the Islamist rebellion in the early 1980s, but the rebellion then was much more localized, so what had changed? Then, many Sunni villages, still incorporated into the Ba'th party and its peasant union, sided with the regime against the urban-based Muslim Brotherhood; however, in the 2000s, the party/peasant union infrastructure and rural services had been debilitated and agriculture neglected and devastated by years of drought. Population growth on fixed land resources had left peasant youth, whose fathers had been part of regime base, landless, dependent on entering a depressed non-agricultural job market, and "available" for anti-regime mobilization. Regime connections to the mass public, whether the ruling party or corporatist structures (trade unions, peasant unions), had withered in a way similar to the case in other Uprising states. But this was especially dangerous in Syria if one considers how crucial this political infrastructure was to allowing a minority-dominated Ba'th regime to consolidate a cross-sectarian power base in the first place.

Agency: stumbling on the way to democratization--from mass protest to the security dilemma

The Failure of Democratic Transition

As Bassam Haddad had anticipated,[6] the one thing that could spread the Arab Uprising to Syria was an over-reaction by the security forces. In a 17 February 2011 protest in the Old City of Damascus the Interior Minister had exemplified how protests ought to be handled: he arrived personally, placated the protestors and disciplined a policeman whose behaviour had sparked the protest. The protests did not spread, despite Syrian expatriates earlier 5 February invocation of a "Day of Rage" against the regime. By contrast, in Dera, formerly

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[6] Bassam Haddad, "Why Syria Is Unlikely to be Next . . . for Now", *Sada*, 9 March 2011, http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/03/09/why-syria-is-unlikely-to-be-next-.-.-.for-now/6bhl

a stronghold of the Ba'th party, a March confrontation between protestors and heavy-handed security forces escalated out of control; resistance quickly spread via tribal networks and sparked sympathy protests in other parts of the country which started a spiral of revolt that the regime would never be able to bring fully under control.

In the early days of the crisis, however, effective leadership from the president could still have made a difference, particularly had Asad reacted with democratic concessions instead of repression. Had Bashar chosen to lead the reform process, he might have actually won a free election to another presidential term. Unfortunately, his March 30, 2011 speech at the beginnings of the protests, in which he deprecated popular grievances, disillusioned the many who wanted him to use the crisis to advance reform.

There appear to have been "soft-liners" in the regime, such as Vice president, Farouk al-Sharaa, who, originating from Dera, was distressed at the use of force there and Bouthina Shabaan, whose public discourse seemed to promise substantial reforms. In reaction to Dera there were hundreds of resignations from the Ba'th party and there were later to be defections among top elites who also presumably would have urged compromise with the protestors. However, in the event, it appears that either the president was a captive of the hardliners or they convinced him that the Uprising could be quickly squashed if substantive force were used; what the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes had done wrong, security chiefs reputedly told Bashar, was to hesitate in their use of repression.

One explanation for his failure to better manage the crisis could be that, preoccupied with foreign policy and having become complacent owing to his success in surviving threats from the US and reversing isolation from Europe, he neglected the domestic vulnerabilities of his regime. One could argue that the most reliable command post of the Syrian state had always been the *mukhabarat* and hence regime leaders' natural fallback position when challenged was to turn to the levers of repression. Further, in the words of the International Crisis Group, the new generation of the ruling elite, 'having inherited power rather than fought for it, grown up in Damascus, mingled with and mimicked the ways of the urban upper class' had lost touch with its social roots.[7] Also, given the minority core of the regime, it may be Asad simply could not afford to make sufficient democratic concessions, especially after the debilitation of the regime's former cross-sectarian base would have made success in elections problematic. In addition, his rule had started to be more of a family regime, and the rest of the clan could well have been losers under democratization, especially the highly unpopular tycoon Rami Makhlouf and Maher al-Asad whose violent overreaction reflected the tribal mentality and

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[7] International Crisis Group, 'The Syrian People's Slow Motion Revolution,' Brussels and Damascus, 6 July 2011.

minority complex of some Alawis in the regime. In the event, Asad chose to stand with the hardliners.

If non-violent protest was going to precipitate a transition, a coalition between soft-liners in the regime and in the opposition combining to marginalize the hardliners was needed, but in the Syrian case, the soft-liners were marginalized on both sides by the regime's use of violence but also by the maximalist demands-fall of the regime – of the opposition. Asad blamed the uprising on external troublemakers and terrorists and while these claims are usually dismissed in the West and were grossly exaggerated, there is a modicum of substance in them. Determined activists, many of them exiles, systematically set out to spread the Arab uprising to Syria, using the Internet and promoting a discourse of democratization meant to de-legitimize the regime. In some instances, the regime was deliberately provoked, when, for example, in sectarian-mixed Banias an uncompromising salafi shaykh exploited years of anti-Alawite resentment among Sunnis. In some places party headquarters or the officers club were attacked, statues of Hafiz al-Asad and portraits of his son were torn down, and, much earlier than is usually acknowledged, there were armed attacks on the regime's security forces.[8] How the regime responded to the protests (and provocations) made all the difference for the Syrian tangent; it did not have to fall into the apparent trap set by its opponents - but it did so in its precipitate resort to disproportionate repression.

But equally, as several analysts argued, the mistake of the Syrian protest movement was its "rush to confrontation" with the regime while the latter still retained significant support.[9] Even though the regime conceded many reforms that the opposition had been demanding for decades and proposed dialogue, those committed to its removal had to dismiss them as inadequate and insincere. Besides the moral outrage at the killings perpetuated by the government, opposition activists believed that they could only be safe if the regime was totally destroyed since if it survived it would be certain to seek retribution.

However, with the hardline opposition insisting on the fall of the regime, and its resort to periodic violence, the soft-liners in the regime were unlikely to marginalize the hardliners. Senior soft-liners, who spoke the language of reconciliation, seemed too far from the immediate levers of command that were in the hands of hardliners such as Maher al-Asad.[10] Similarly, internal

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[8] Robert Worth, "The Price of Loyalty in Syria", *New York Times*, 19 June 2013. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/magazine/the-price-of-loyalty-in-syria.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=2&pagewanted=all&

[9] Maged Mandour, "Beyond Civil Resistance: The Case of Syria", *openDemocracy*, 26 October 2013, www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/maged-mandour/beyond-civil-resistance-case-of-syria.

[10] Peter Harling, 'Syria's Race against the Clock', *Foreign Policy*, 11 Apr. 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/04/11/syrias_race_against_the_clock

third parties who tried to mediate were squeezed out, notably the traditional opposition organized in the National Coordination Committee (NCC) whose members were much more experienced than the younger demonstrators. At the famous Samiramis conference in June 2013 they put forth a compromise proposal but both regime and opposition rejected it.

Why did a negotiated transition fail? The spilling of blood happened so quickly on such a significant scale that compromise was soon rejected on both sides. With regime concessions, too little too late, the opposition escalated its resistance via ever larger mass demonstrations which in turn provoked violent and repressive counter-escalation by the regime. Henceforth also the opposition lacked credible leaders who could deliver its consent to a negotiated settlement should that have appeared in its interest.

In summary, an Egyptian or Tunisian scenario of relatively peaceful transition toward democratization would have required that, in parallel, soft-liners in the regime and the opposition marginalize the hardliners on both sides and reach a deal on power-sharing and transition. Instead, on both sides, the hardliners marginalized the soft-liners.

Regime resilience in the face of mass protest

The Syrian Uprising took particular forms, both similar and different from those in other Uprising states. Among the similarities was the key role assumed by youth activists. Events in Tunisia and Egypt spread the idea that popular protests could indeed succeed in overthrowing authoritarian rulers and broke the "fear barrier" in Syria, creating an illusion of empowerment especially among youth. Diaspora activists played a pivotal role, using the Internet and new media, in encouraging revolt. Mobilization took place on two levels: at the local level, coordinating committees planned day to day protests while cyber activists used the internet to share information, coordinate and publicize their protests, keep the momentum going and convey a sense of national-level solidarity.[11] As in other cases, also, protestors were able to mount sustained large-scale demonstrations that put the regime very much on the defensive.

The main difference, however, from Egypt and Tunisia where a similar spiral took hold, was that the president was not quickly overthrown in a relatively brief and sharp burst of revolt quickly converging on the center of power. Different from Egypt but somewhat similar to Libya, the uprising was geographically dispersed and away from the capital, beginning in the rural peripheries, then spreading to small towns, suburbs, and medium sized cities, where its foot soldiers were unemployed youth, refugees from drought and

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[11] Kim Ghattas, 'Syria's spontaneously organised protests', *BBC News*, 22 Apr. 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13168276

others among the "losers" of a decade of post-populist neo-liberalism. For a considerable period, protest was contained in the periphery while the centers of power (Damascus) and business (Aleppo) stayed relatively immune. This corresponded precisely to the geographical distribution of benefits and costs of Bashar's post-populist upgrading.

Different from other cases, also, was that the Uprising had from the beginning a sectarian dimension, inevitable given the Alawi dominance of the regime and the concentration of the Uprising among the majority Sunnis. The main occasion for mobilization became Friday prayers, with *imams*, natural leaders of their neighbourhoods and, outside the main cities, mostly anti-regime. Saudi-financed salafi and Muslim Brotherhood connected elements actively mobilized protestors. Initial centers of grievances were mixed areas where Alawis and Sunni lived together as in Latakia, Banias and Homs. The Uprising then spread to Hama and Deir az-Zur, traditional bastions of Sunni piety resentful of the regime. Tribes also played a role; the decline of the security forces' control of them thorough subsidies and exemptions and its replacement by Saudi money was important in the regime's loss of control over the tribal periphery.

Given this character of the opposition-pious lower class, rural and Sunni -the social base on which the regime relied to survive had many of the opposite characteristics and was the product of a decade of "authoritarian upgrading." It comprised the crony capitalists, urban government employees and the minorities, especially Alawis and to a lesser degree Christians who, not suffering from the restrictions on public religiosity and church building typical elsewhere, were rallied by exploiting their fear of salafi Islam. The main cities, Damascus and Aleppo, where the investment boom, the take-off of tourism and the new consumption were concentrated, remained largely quiescent months into the Uprising, although their poor suburbs were often hotbeds of revolt. The regime was able to mobilize significant counter-demonstrations in these cities. The middle class of the two main cities originally saw Bashar as a reformer and while they were disillusioned by his repression of the protestors they preferred a peaceful democratization and feared instability and loss of their secular modern life style if traditional rural or salafi insurgents took power. Senior urban *ulama*, many of whom had been co-opted, took advantage of the uprising to win new concessions from the regime rather than abandoning it.

As with all post-populist regimes, Bashar's had started to forge an alignment with the business class, but such "authoritarian upgrading" had gone much less far in Syria than in Egypt or Tunisia and cooptation of the bourgeoisie on the regime side was not as thorough as in Egypt. Aggrandizement of the presidential family also weakened the regime's potential class support for its neo-liberal tangent. Indeed, exiled businessmen who had lost out to regime-connected operators were big funders of the insurgency. Still, much

of the in-country business class saw no alternative to the regime and initially hoped it would end the disorder.

A main difference from all other Uprising cases was that a major split in the regime or army did not happen. The opposition strategy depended on a level and scale of protests that the security services would be stretched thin and exhausted, perhaps so provoked they would increase violence that would turn a majority of the population against the regime, or split the regime internally and especially lead to such disaffection in the army that it would become an unreliable instrument of repression.

However, the military, organized around its Alawi core and closely linked to the presidential clan, but also long invested in the regime through the military branches of the Ba'th party, remained largely cohesive and loyal. It did not turn against its superiors and enough loyal units were willing to fire on demonstrators. The defections that did take place did not touch upon the core of the government's power base until much later when non-violence had become marginalized. Alawi dominated units, such as the 4th division, headed by Maher al-Asad, and the Republican Guard, seen as the most loyal, were most involved in repression. Alawis were also mobilized in militias (the *shabiha*), later organized into a formal national guard, and were recruited into the military reserves; with much to lose if the regime fell, they remained its most reliable shock troops. Moreover, as the Syrian army generally became implicated in the repression-with protestors starting to denounce it-its stake in regime survival increased. Defections were of a lesser scale and amounted to attrition over time rather than the sudden major splits or collapse of the army in Yemen and Libya and contrasted even more sharply with the early refusal of the military top commands in Tunisia and Egypt to defend the President against protestors.

While al-Asad's regime's increasing use of lethal force against non-violent protestors *did* alienate wide swaths of the public, as the non-violent resistance paradigm expects, because society rapidly became communally polarized, the opposition could be constructed, among the regime's constituency, as the "other." As for the many Syrians caught in the middle, especially the upper and middle classes, the regime's claim to defend order against the disruption unleashed by the Uprising caused a significant portion of them to acquiesce in it as the lesser of two evils; this was all the more the case once radical Islamists, and especially al-Qaida-linked jihadists, assumed a high profile within the opposition and as the opposition itself fragmented into warring camps.

In summary, it is apparent is that there were enough grievances to fuel an uprising in Syria but only among a plurality of the population, with a significant minority adhering to the regime as a better alternative than civil war, and the majority on the sidelines. This helps explain the regime's ability to sustain its cohesion and retain control of the main cities, Damascus and

Aleppo (until part of the latter fell to jihadist incursions).[12] This scenario is quite at odds with the non-violent resistance paradigm in which the regime's violence progressively isolates it from the vast majority of the population, precipitating its collapse and it distinguishes Syria from Tunisia and Egypt where the incumbent presidents proved unable to rally sufficient support to survive. This points to the reality, ignored by the resistance paradigm, that differences in the social structure of societies and composition of regimes makes for important variations in the vulnerability of authoritarian regimes to revolt. In homogeneous societies such as Egypt and Tunisia mass anti-regime mobilization is likely to be much more thorough and decisive than in communally divided ones like Syria; and where the presidency's clientalist and political ties to the military are stronger and the army's institutional autonomy lesser, the military is far less likely to jettison presidents to save itself.

From the "Security Solution" to the "Security Dilemma"

Throughout 2011 and into 2012, the numbers of anti-regime demonstrators ran into the tens of thousands and major protests took place without respite in virtually every Syrian town and city except Damascus and Aleppo, such that, even though unarmed, they posed a serious threat to the regime's survival. The regime's forces, lacking training and experience in crowd or riot control, continued to respond with excessive violence, multiplying its enemies and making funerals occasions for more confrontation. However, the opposition was complicit with the regime in the deterioration into violence. Indeed, both sides opted consistently to escalate the level of violence and thus, further polarized society, resulting, however, in stalemates which both then sought to overcome through further escalation.

The regime, despite the high risks, deliberately sought to rally the solidarity of its minority base, intertwined with the security forces, by sectarianizing the issue, accusing the opposition of Islamic terrorism, framing the issue as a choice between stability and social peace and jihadi violence to win the support of minorities, who could expect retribution if the regime fell. The opposition initially sought to win over the minorities with a rhetoric of civic inclusion; however, as democracy activists either exited Syria or fell back on religious zeal in a time of high insecurity, the balance shifted to Islamist hardliners, empowered by money and guns from the Gulf. The opposition also had an incentive to sectarianize the conflict since to the extent it became framed in sectarian terms a regime of minorities would be vulnerable to a large demographic imbalance (70%) in favour of the Sunnis majority from whom the bulk of the protestors were drawn.[13]

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[12] Hassan Abbas, 'The Dynamics of the Uprising in Syria,' *Arab Reform Brief*, 51, October, 2011, p 9.

[13] Of course, many Sunnis were secular, hence would not normally mobilize on the basis of Sunni identity and this figure also include the Kurds (7-10%) whose separate ethnic identity overrode their Sunnism.

Another major dimension in the escalation of the conflict was the battle for cities in which the opposition sought to escape from confinement in the peripheries. The opposition realized it could not win without breaking the alignment between the regime, on the one hand, and the bourgeoisie and middle class, on the other hand, in the two main cities, Damascus and Aleppo, where many valued stability and had much to lose economically from the disorder and which therefore remained immune in the first year to the spread of the Uprising. At first the opposition thought that the turmoil and Western sanctions would paralyze the economy enough to cause the business elites to desert the regime, while sanctions would sap the regime's revenue base, hence its ability to pay salaries and sustain the loyalties of the state administration. However, an economic collapse did not take place, and more importantly, the regime proved capable of perpetuating itself financially.

Ultimately, therefore, to turn the main cities against the regime, parts of the opposition reverted to the strategy of showing that the regime could not guarantee stability. It therefore turned to bombings and armed infiltrations into urban neighborhoods and suburbs; the regime, in turn, used heavy weapons against suburban neighborhoods harboring the insurgents to send the message to populations that such armed groups should not be tolerated in their midst. Homs, which slipped almost entirely under opposition control, became a particular victim of this dynamic in which regime violence against urban neighborhoods was particularly bloody. A further watershed in intensification of the conflict was its spread to Aleppo where the opposition escalated the fight, infiltrating and seizing half of the city, to demonstrate that the upper and middle classes would not remain immune to the violence; in summer 2012 battles in Aleppo drew increasing numbers of jihadist fighters. The regime resorted to air and artillery attacks on urban built up areas. There followed the destruction of large parts of Syrian's industrial base and looting on a massive scale as whole factories were dismantled and exported to Turkey.

Militarization of the conflict was perhaps inevitable. It was the regime that chose fatefully to further escalate its security solution-from use of the police and militias-to a military solution in which heavy weapons and aircraft were used in urban areas. The move toward a military solution appears partly to have been a response to the killing of over a hundred regime soldiers and police in the Islamist stronghold of Jisr ash-Shaghour in June 2011 and also a bid to prevent establishment of "liberated areas" that would facilitate Western intervention on behalf of the opposition, as had happened in Libya. As the regime found it impossible to contain the protests at one level of violence, it increased the level thereby killing many innocents and peaceful protestors and, eventually, destroying entire neighbourhoods. The regime's escalation generated a desire for revenge and legitimized the notion of armed self-defense among the mostly Sunni opposition. Eventually, perhaps 10,000 defectors from a 200,000-man Syrian army formed the core of armed resis-

tance to the government, the Free Syrian Army, while many of the protestors joined armed Islamist groups, which could soon deploy tens of thousands of fighters. The regime may have welcomed a militarized opposition as an enemy easier to deal with than mass civil protesters. In abandoning peaceful protest, the opposition opened the door for the regime to move from the security solution to the military solution. Red lines regarding the use of particular weapons systems were overstepped one by one, with the much better armed regime usually leading the way: a spiral of violence led from bullets to bombs, tanks and fighter planes and, as the conflict entered its third year, also chemical weapons, with both conflicting parties perpetrated violations of human rights.

As order broke down, the "security dilemma" kicked in and each side resorted to defensive tactics that made both more insecure, while trapping much of the population in the middle. Hatreds of the "other" spread the conviction on both sides that no political solution was possible, even once it became clear that neither could defeat the other. As the conflict morphed into semi-sectarian civil war, whole communities became entrapped in the "security dilemma," seeing the "other" as enemies. Mass flows of refugees emptied the country of many of those caught in between and also of many of the secular middle class peaceful protestors, leaving the field to the radical Islamists.

Jihadists and al-Qaida arrived on the scene since they saw a failing state as a perfect arena to recover the momentum they had lost when the Arab Spring made it appear that non-violent protest could produce democratic transitions. Most of these groups were under no unified command and not accountable to any civilian political body. Instead, they maintained diverse and opaque connections to domestic or, more often, foreign bodies and thus contributed to the internationalization of the conflict.

The armed opposition's capacity to deny the regime control in many areas and the army's lack of sufficient reliable manpower to repress what became widespread armed insurgency, led the regime to withdraw into its strategic southern and western heartlands; this left much of rural northern and eastern Syria out of government control, a scenario somewhat similar to Libya but different from Egypt where the army retained territorial control (except in the Sinai). Three years after the Uprising began, the country had become divided between regime and opposition controlled regions, an egregious example of a failed state.

The External Factor Drives Internal War

From the outset, the possibility of external military intervention shaped both opposition and regime strategies. Anti-regime activists, including Syrian expatriates who were instrumental in initiating and internationalizing the Uprising, understood that they could not succeed without external intervention

to restrain the regime's repressive options. External activists told those on the ground, pointing to the Libya no-fly zone, that "the international community won't sit and watch you be killed." They claimed that another Hama was not possible because "Everything is being filmed on YouTube and there's a lot of international attention on the Middle East"[14] There were reports that the opposition, particularly external internet activists, systematically exaggerated bloodshed and found willing partners in the Western press and particularly in the Gulf-owned Pan-Arab media whose patrons saw an opportunity to remove an Iranian ally.[15]

The regime for its part, having survived several decades of international isolation orchestrated by the US, but also involving Europe, had always seen itself as besieged by foreign enemies; the role played by external exiles and internet activists abroad, often Western funded, in provoking or escalating the Uprising was congruent with its perceptions of conspiracy. It tarnished the indigenous opposition with the suspicion of treasonous dealings with foreign enemies, justifying the resort to repressive violence. It could be said to have been a major mistake of opposition activists, deluded by Western discourse of humanitarian intervention and international human rights, to solicit support from external powers in a region where the struggle against "Western imperialism" remains so salient.

The West did become involved but, in so doing, it made a major contribution to the further deterioration of the situation. It slapped sanctions on the regime meant to deprive it of oil revenue, which was indeed, a key step in the debilitation of the *state* and of its capacity to provide basic services to the population, *but not of the regime,* which found alternative informal sources of revenue; this was yet another in a long line of examples that prove how blunt and untargeted such sanctions always are. The West also moved to diplomatically isolate and demonize the regime, withdrawing its ambassadors, and with Western politicians clamouring for military intervention and raising the spectre of the International Criminal Court; at a certain point, the regime inner core realized that there was no way back for them and that they had to hang together or hang separately and do whatever was necessary to survive, including escalating from the security to a military solution. Yet the threats against the regime by the West, while encouraging protestors, proved, as so often, to be hollow and hence to contribute to making a bad situation worse. The regime tried to calibrate its violence within limits that would not trigger an international bandwagon toward intervention, although over time this bar was steadily raised. But not dependent, as the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes were

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[14] Kate Seelye, 'Syria Unrest "Cannot Be Contained"', *The Daily Beast,* 28 Mar. 2011, www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/03/28/syria-unrest-cannot-be-contained-dissidents-say.html.

[15] Angela Joya, 'Syria and the Arab Spring: The Evolution of the Conflict and the Role of Domestic External and Factors', *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol.4, No. 1, July 2012, 40–3.

on the West, the regime had far less need to restrain its use of violence against protestors. In mid-2011 it also felt the need to quickly smash resistance so as not to lose control of territory that could be used to stage intervention as had happened in Libya; the Libyan precedent thus helped precipitate a transition from the "security solution" to the "military solution."

While the uprising started indigenous, it was much intensified by regional forces, which turned Syria into a regional battleground among those who believed that the outcome in Syria would shift the wider power balance in the Middle East. Qatar used Al-Jazeera to amplify the uprising from the outset, while the Saudis funnelled money and arms to anti-regime tribes. In November 2011, Qatar and Saudi Arabia prompted the Arab League into unprecedented moves to isolate Syria, aimed, together with parallel European sanctions, at drying up the regime's access to economic resources and breaking its coalition with the business class. An anti-Asad coalition, led by France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, with the US in the background, and with the collaboration of lesser actors such as the Hariri faction in Lebanon and the new Libyan regime, began financing, training, arming and infiltrating insurgents into the country, escalating the militarization of the conflict. The safe haven provided by Turkey to the armed opposition particularly enabled it to "liberate" vast areas bordering Turkey from regime control. Somewhat later, trans-national jihadists flowed into the country, acquiring a dominant position in the east as this area slipped out of government control.

The Asad regime's ability to slip out of this tightening stranglehold depended on its links to Hezbollah in the west and, in the east, to Iran and Iraq. It increasingly relied on Iran, whose Revolutionary Guard assisted it with electronic warfare and which urged Iraq to provide Syria with cheap oil and to stay out of the anti-Asad coalition and later on Hizbollah fighters whose entry into the fray tipped the balance toward the regime in the western areas bordering Lebanon. Meanwhile Russia and China, antagonized by the West's use of a UN humanitarian resolution to promote regime change at their expense in Libya, protected Asad from a similar scenario.

These external involvements, each blocking the other, contributed to the stalemating of the conflict: Turkish, Saudi and Qatari support for the opposition being offset by Iranian, Hizbollah and Iraqi support for the regime; and internationally, American and European support for the Uprising being offset by Russian and Chinese support for the regime. The resources external powers provided to their Syrian proxies was also crucial in keeping the conflict going.

Failed State, War Economy

Once the Syrian state failed, the conflict came to betray symptoms of Mary Kaldor's "New Wars."[16] In her scenario, state weakening, itself linked ulti-

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[16] Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999).

mately to globalization, empowers transnational non-state actors. When order breaks down, the security dilemma kicks in as warring sides engage in identity wars and ethnic cleansing, and the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is blurred. Warlordism fills the security gap; refugee flows, funding by Diasporas, and transnational arms trafficking embed the conflict in wider regional struggles that make it all the harder to resolve. Since neither regime or opposition had by 2014 any prospect of victory over the other, they ought potentially to have been close to the "hurting" stalemate that would allow both sides to be ready to settle for less than victory and to try to minimize their losses, which continued on all sides, rather than maximize their gains. However, this dynamic was short-circuited by the war economy that was generated by outside funding and arms: it helped the regime to continue fighting, attracted foreign fighters to the opposition and helped recruit Syrians, who had lost their livelihood, to militant groups, with more attracted to the best-funded, usually radical or at least Islamist factions.

Conclusion - Syria: failed transition

The Syrian Uprising began with massive protests that the Asad regime could not quickly suppress and which put it very much on the defensive. Yet it did not stimulate a transition to a more politically inclusive political order and led instead to civil war. A pacted transition was frustrated by the marginalization of the soft-liners on both sides. On the one hand, the President's choice to respond to the demonstrations with a "security solution" rather than democratic reforms mattered: in standing with regime hardliners, he empowered the hardliners in the opposition as well. On the other hand, the opposition, with exaggerated confidence in the efficacy of mass protest (owing to Western discourse as well as events in Tunisia and Egypt) bore some responsibility for this failure as its increasingly maximalist demands made an insider-outsider coalition unlikely.

Nor could the opposition mount sufficient civil disorder to force the departure of the president and his core supporters. The protests began in the peripheries, rather than at the heart of power, where the regime had co-opted key social forces and retained sufficient support to block a periphery move on the centre. There were enough grievances to fuel an uprising but only among a plurality of the population, with others adhering to the regime as a better alternative than civil war, and the majority on the side-lines. The regime framed the protests as radical Islamic terrorism in order to rally the support of secular the middle class, the minorities, and, in particular, its Alawi constituency, which dominated the security forces. Clearly, authoritarian regimes constructed in fragmented societies around a cohesive communal and armed core may be far less susceptible to non-violent resistance regardless of its magnitude and duration. The security forces did not generally split and while there were defections, notably among Sunni officers, rather than leading to regime

collapse this merely militarized the conflict, and, as the army proved unable to retain full territorial control, precipitated the division of the country into mutually exclusive and contested zones.

There were several watersheds in the descent into armed civil war when agency could have mattered and the conflict stopped. However, each side sought to break the stalemate by escalating the conflict. The opposition sought to de-stabilize the state through massive civil unrest, to undermine the economy and to spread disorder to the cities and break the regime alliance with business. To work, this required that external constraints deter full-scale regime repression – or that the latter would provoke outside intervention. Far from being deterred, the opposition's call for external intervention only encouraged the regime to move toward a "military solution" that did not spare civilians or shrink from use of heavy weapons against urban neighbourhoods, thus precipitated the overall militarization of the uprising.

The outcome, thus, was neither revolution nor effective repression, but stalemate and a failed state, with the security dilemma, external intervention on behalf of the warring sides and the war economy giving civil war an extended shelf life. One of the lessons of this story is the fragility of fragmented states like Syria: it is relatively easy to de-stabilize them, but much harder to put the pieces back together.

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